

Briefing Paper

Milwaukee Wiser Choice (Wisconsin Supports Everyone's Recovery)

(January 22, 2007 Version #4)

Background:

On August 3, 2004, Wisconsin was one of 14 states to receive a federal grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) called Access to Recovery (ATR). The grant required establishing an electronic voucher system allowing individuals in need of substance abuse services to choose from a wide selection of treatment providers, recovery support coordinators and recovery support services.

The grant, which was awarded to the Governor's Office, totaled \$23 million dollars for three years and stipulated that 7,400 new individuals be served. Unless a new federal appropriation occurs, the grant program is scheduled to end August 1, 2007. If the total federal funding is eliminated, up to 3,000 individuals a year will not be able to choose and receive substance abuse treatment and recovery support services.

Program Description:

Wisconsin chose to focus the grant on Milwaukee County and called the program Wiser Choice. Other significant features of Milwaukee Wiser Choice include the following:

- The program focuses on two target populations: Department of Correction male and female clients (those re-entering Milwaukee from prison on parole and to those as an alternative to revocation or return to prison) and the general county population in need of substance abuse treatment based on assessment.
- The program braids existing funding with the federal ATR grant including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), federal block grant funds, state community aids and local property tax.
- Ramping-up of the system transformation occurred from August 2004 to June 2005.
- The substance abuse system was transformed to a system where consumers are allowed to choose providers from a vastly expanded list of providers. This was done by going from a provider grant program to a voucher based, fee-for-service system.
- The transformed system now includes three central intakes and 8 recovery support agencies offering case management. One of the central intakes specializes in assessment of correctional clients re-entering Milwaukee County from prisons and individuals at risk of revocation or return to prison.
- After assessment for eligibility and treatment needs at a central intake, an eligible client selects a recovery support coordinator from one of the 8 agencies and the treatment of one's choice from a list of 170 providers. In addition, given the additional federal funds, individuals and recovery support coordinators select recovery support services (e.g., housing, transportation, day care, consumer and faith-based support). One must be in a treatment program to receive recovery support services.

Description of People Served:

The following demographic information is based on 5,719 individuals who during 2006 received an intake and treatment.

- 54% of the clients served identified themselves as African-American while 34% were White and 1.3% Native American.
- In a separate question, 10.5 % of the individuals identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

- Males represent 72% of the clients and females 28%.
- Of the 1,613 females, 5% were pregnant.
- Regarding substance abuse treatment, 28% identified cocaine as the major problem while 18% identified Cannabis and 4% Heroin. Alcohol was identified as the major treatment issue for 22% of the individuals.
- Nearly 2/3's or 62.3% of the individuals reported some current involvement with the criminal justice system including 1) on probation/parole, 2) referred by DOC, or 3) Awaiting Trial.

System Outcomes:

The following outcomes are based on client records in 13-month periods before and after full implementation of Milwaukee Wiser Choice in late June of 2005.

- Provider Network Expanded: The total number of recovery support service and clinical treatment providers in the Milwaukee substance abuse network increased over 700% from 22 providers to a total of 170. This has provided the clients with a truly enhanced level of choice. The number of Faith Based Organizations within the total Provider Network increased 500% from 7 agencies to 40.
- More Clients Accessed Services: The total number of intakes increased by 61%, from 4,318 to 6,945.
- More Clients Received Services: The total number of clients receiving clinical services increased by 170%, from 1,759 to 4,875.
- More Clients Finished Treatment Episodes: The percentage of all clients closed from a particular treatment episode as successful increased from 21.3% to 50.7%.
- More Clients Completed Treatment: The total number of clients closed for the reason "completed treatment" increased from an average of 23.6 per month to an average of 145.0 per month. Thus, Milwaukee Wiser Choice resulted in a six-fold increase in the number of clients who completed treatment.

Outcomes of Treatment and Recovery Support Services for Individuals:

Outcomes information was gathered for a sample of 2,196 clients over an 18-month period who had completed both Intake and a 30-day follow-up review:

- Over 3/4's of the Clients Abstained from Alcohol Use and 4/5's from Drug Use: Of clients who identified "alcohol" as their major problem, 77% were abstinent from alcohol after 30 days of services, while 13% reported reduced alcohol use. Of clients who identified drugs other than "alcohol" as their major problem, 80% were abstinent from drugs after 30 days of services and 9% reported reduced drug use.
- More Clients Stayed in Treatment: The percentage of all clients referred for clinical substance abuse services who presented for their first appointment and received clinical services increased from 40% to 82% between the pre and post Wiser Choice periods. 68% of all clients who presented for the first treatment appointment continued in treatment for at least 30 days.

- **Employment Improved:** The percentage of clients employed or enrolled in school or job training increased from 28.5% at intake to 39.0% after 30 days of services; 331 clients who were not employed nor in school at intake had become employed or had enrolled in school or job training after 30 days. After 90 days, 54.5% of those in treatment were either employed or enrolled school/job training.
- **Homelessness was Reduced:** The percentage of clients who were homeless (including those in shelters) dropped from 12.8% at intake to 7.8% after 30 days of services; 102 clients who were homeless at intake were no longer homeless after 30 days. At the end of 90 days, only 5.5% of the clients still in treatment were homeless.
- **Family Connections Strengthened:** The percentage of clients who had “little or no” or “usually negative” contact with their families was reduced from 14.5% at intake to 8.3% after 30 days of services. This means 109 clients who did not have positive contact with their families at intake were having positive contact after 30 days. For those still in treatment at 90 days, only 6.3% of the clients had little, no, or negative contact with their families.
- **Arrest Rates were Reduced:** The percentage of clients who had been arrested at least once in the past 30 days dropped from 11.4% at intake to 2.0% after 30 days of services; 181 clients who had been arrested in the 30 days prior to intake had no arrests during their first 30 days of services.
- **Return to Prison Less Likely:** The data for this outcome is still preliminary or only based on individuals who entered the program between July and November of 2005 and had 12 months or more to commit an act that would return one to prison. Of 16 females on parole who re-entered Milwaukee County and completed treatment only one has returned to prison; whereas, 10 of 31 females who did not complete or begin treatment returned to prison.

Anticipated Impact of Federal Funding Loss:

Based on the above data, if the substance abuse system in Milwaukee were returned to the level of funding and type of services provided prior to ATR funding and system transformation, it is estimate that:

- About 2,500 fewer people a year would be screened for the need for substance abuse services.
- About 3,000 fewer people a year would receive clinical services.
- About 1,500 fewer people a year would complete treatment.
- Correctional clients re-entering Milwaukee County and those at risk of revocation to prison will no longer have priority status or separate access to intake and services.
- Recovery support services and case coordination will be significantly reduced if not eliminated.
- Provider agencies would face fiscal difficulties and possible closures due to reduced demand for their services.